

"PINOCHLE"

Taken from the
Notebook of an Old Detective
by Charles Edmonds Walk
And With Names and Places Hidden Published as a Proof That
Truth Is Stranger Than Fiction

On the records of the Sutherland Detective agency Helen Bertel's name was only one of several after which appeared the word, "Stenographer."

As a matter of fact, in certain special lines of work this uncommonly pretty, self-reliant girl was one of the most capable operatives the company ever had in its employ. Although Felix Hazard's lean, hawklike visage was too well schooled to betray any hint of his deeper feelings, nevertheless sometimes while looking at her his dark eyes took on an intense glow that shook the girl's poise. She was wont to chide herself because this look had the power of agitating her, and she would discourage it in different ways—sometimes by treating Hazard with cool reserve, another time by poking fun at him, or, most effective of all, by making some abrupt, unexpected appeal to his friendship. They never quarreled; they were much too good pals for that.

So on a certain June morning—the first, to be definite—when Hazard found a note upon his desk in her handwriting, which was as familiar to him as his own, he forgot everything else until he had read it some half-dozen times.

As he tore open the envelope and spread out the single sheet therein contained, two objects fell out and fluttered to the floor. He picked them up. They were in the corners of two playing-cards, the knave of diamonds and the queen of spades. These he laid carefully aside and read:

My dear Felix:
Take me to luncheon today and I'll tell you about the enclosed relics.—H.
For possibly a minute he gravely speculated upon the card fragments; but they only teased his curiosity. The ragged torn edges exactly matched, demonstrating the two corners had been held tightly together when the balance of the cards were torn away: this was the sole inference he was able to draw from the "relics."

Promptly at half-past twelve Helen Bertel's animated face appeared at Hazard's doorway. She was a tall, graceful girl, fond of tennis and of being both on and in the water, for besides being an ardent swimmer she was also an expert diver—a choice of pastimes than which no others are better adapted to mold the figure in perfect lines and give health and strength and beauty and the pantherlike litheness that characterized her every movement.

She called to him brightly from the threshold:

"Ready?"

"And waiting," he returned, grabbing his hat and following her to the elevator.

It was not until the waiter had poured Hazard's demi-tasse and held a lighted match to his cigarette that Miss Bertel, propping her elbows upon the table and resting one cheek upon her clasped hands, referred to the subject that was uppermost in her mind.

"Felix, I have a neighbor who needs your help—a poor widow with a scapegrace brother. Their uncle was murdered day before yesterday, and the two are entitled to his money."

Hazard darted a sharp glance at her.

"Murdered?" he repeated inquiringly. "Who was he?"

"Henry Paradis."

For some moments the man scrutinized the pretty face opposite his. "According to the newspapers that was an accidental death," said he. "I don't know much about it, though."

"I'll tell you about it. For my neighbor's sake I interested myself in the case; I've gone as far with it as I can without a man's assistance. You're the man."

What she recounted may be briefly sketched.

On the morning of May 31st the lifeless body of Henry Paradis had been found, under peculiar circumstances, at his North Halsted street residence. In the middle of the room used by the old bachelor as a library stood a table-deck, and lying on a rug in front of this and underneath a protruding drawer the body had been discovered by the household's sole servant, a middle-aged negro named Sam Webb.

There were numerous factors that tended to veil the fatality in mystery. On the surface these factors suggested that Henry Paradis had opened a drawer of his desk and immediately fallen dead from a bullet wound inflicted by his own revolver. By way of mute testimony, there was the partially open drawer half full of neatly tied packages of letters, together with papers and documents of various sorts, upon top of which lay the weapon. Its cylinder contained five loaded cartridges and one freshly exploded shell. The revolver was of a well-known make, 28-caliber, and just below the dead man's head was a small purplish puncture which a few minutes' probing demonstrated to have been made by a bullet of the same size. Powder marks on the left breast of his shabby old house-jacket showed that the muzzle had been close when the weapon was fired.

From these details the police and reporters, and next the coroner's jury, drew their conclusion that the old man had accidentally been overtaken by death, without in a most extraordinary manner.

"However," added Miss Bertel, "in spite of the verdict and the police, they are suspicious of the niece, Mrs. Pell, and her young brother, Curtis Paradis—not wholly without reason, either, I must admit."

Mrs. Pell, while begging me to

This story throbs with realism in the word's narrowest meaning. It is a faithful rendering of an authentic experience in the career of a high official of a detective agency whose name is a household word throughout the English-speaking world. Real names of persons and places are sometimes disguised. In all other respects the amazing, often thrilling, always gripping facts are recorded just as they happened.

help her, is afraid to talk much; there is something she is holding back; and whatever it is, if I'm any judge of another woman's character, it's something that will tend to incriminate either her or her brother.

"Here are the facts that make it look bad for her: A bitter enmity has kept her and his uncle apart for years. Not since she was a little girl has she been in the house, save twice—once about a week ago and again on the evening of the 28th of May. On the occasion of the last visit Sam Webb says he heard them quarreling about money."

"Now the murder occurred some time during the night of the 30th. Decoration day. Nobody heard the shot, and the tragedy was not discovered until seven o'clock next morning."

"Why," Hazard queried, "are you so positive it was murder?"

"There are several reasons why I can't accept the police theory," Miss Bertel replied.

"First, it is asking a good deal of one to believe that anybody can be



The Effect of This Simple Question Was Extraordinary.

killed by a revolver catching in a drawer in such a way that merely opening the drawer should explode it; then, that the weapon should be aimed so unerringly at the victim's heart simply knocks the law of probabilities to smithereens. It's impossible."

"But I got most of my ideas from Sam Webb—those two card corners, for instance. He slipped them to me and told me he had found them tightly clenched in the dead man's right hand. Now there wasn't a deck of cards in the house from which the jack of diamonds and the queen of spades were missing."

"Here are several curious facts in this connection. Mrs. Pell tells me that in his younger days Henry Paradis was a gambler, but that years ago he foreswore cards and all games of chance. Now then, according to Sam Webb, early in March the old man's interest in cards all at once revived, and he became a pinochle fiend. And, too, early in March is the time when young Curtis Paradis, the nephew, first appeared on the scene. Also at about this time Henry Paradis took up with a disreputable individual named Blackburn, a tinnier gambler who hangs out at a neighborhood saloon. Sam says there used to be some notable games at the house, marked by constant quarrels and bickerings—either between Curtis and his uncle, or between Blackburn and the uncle; never between Curtis and Blackburn, nor, to Sam's knowledge, was there ever a game when the three played all together."

"I'm simply giving you these facts for what they might be worth; they tell me next to nothing."

"Finally, on the afternoon of May twenty-ninth Henry Paradis drew from his bank \$2,800 in currency, which so far is missing."

II.

Felix Hazard spent the better part of the afternoon nosing about the North Halsted street neighborhood. He gathered a lot of information of one sort and another, the net result of which he summed up in the reflection: "If Helen wanted to help her friend, she'd better leave let the coroner's verdict stand."

For, among other things, he learned that Mrs. Pell had called the Para-

dis house early on the evening of May 30th—the evening of the tragedy—and that Curtis Paradis also had been seen thereabouts by at least two persons. One individual asserted that about nine o'clock of the same night he had seen Curtis hurrying away from his uncle's residence and in the direction of the car barn at Dewey place; that he appeared nervous and agitated, and that he was tearing to pieces as he went along and scattering broadcast what looked like "a couple of postcards," but which, the spectator having been made inquisitive, on examination proved to be two playing cards!

These circumstances, in connection with the fact that Henry Paradis must have been slain some time during the night of May 30th, and that the \$2,800 was nowhere to be found, indeed looked bad for Mrs. Pell and her brother.

It was at a nearby corner saloon, however, that Hazard obtained definite knowledge of Blackburn, the "tinnier," and in addition some general knowledge of Henry Paradis' character that was in no way a credit thereto.

Speaking of Curtis Paradis, the barkeeper told Hazard that the young man was an automobile mechanic who had come to Chicago from Kansas City about March 1st in search of employment.

"He sure was some pinochle fiend," averred the informant, "a regular bug. Only one other gink around here—fella named Nick Blackburn—that's as bad. Blackburn, he is a shark, out for the coin there is in it, and booby, like this young Paradis, are pickin' for him." The speaker abruptly asked:

"As they entered what proved to be the kitchen, Paradis protested with nervous volubility that he had fired on a sudden impulse."

"I thought it was that crazy nigger coming back," he amplified. "He nearly frightened my sister to death."

At this juncture a pale-faced, terrified woman appeared in a doorway opening into the house's farther recesses.

"Don't hurt Curtis," she pleaded tremulously. "He's innocent. Are you an officer? Oh, I'm glad—so glad! Let us tell you all we have to tell about this terrible affair!"

As this proffer exactly met the visitor's desire, he was soon listening to

"Have you any idea why old Henry Paradis warmed up to Blackburn? No? I'll tell you. The old man was learning to play pinochle. Yes, sir, he was! He paid Blackburn to teach him; not just the rules of the game, y'understand, but the fine points that win games. For two hours, three times a week, he gave old Paradis lessons on inside pinochle, at two bucks per night."

"In less'n two weeks the old man wins back not only all he'd paid Nick, but about all Nick had picked up here besides. That's goin' some for an old party like him. Why, blamed if Nick didn't have to go to work!"

For some reason Felix Hazard found himself strongly attracted toward Mr. Nick Blackburn; and by following an inclination to learn all that he could of this individual, he early found the apparently plain trail of Henry Paradis' slayer to be splitting up into a number of confusing and misleading by-paths.

For example, Blackburn had been rooming opposite the car barns, in the direction of which Curtis Paradis had been seen going on the fatal night, tearing in small pieces two playing cards; but the barkeeper thought Blackburn had given up his room, having found employment on some lake boat.

Hazard was shown the room, where the landlady was still keeping its recent occupant's effects pending his calling for them, and by the simple strategy of sending her to fetch some matches he contrived to pocket a pack of playing cards which lay on a small shelf.

Subsequent examination proved them to be a pinochle deck from which one knave of diamonds and one queen of spades were missing!

III.

To round out the day's work, Hazard resolved to call at the Paradis residence, hoping that he might be able to see and interview the negro servant, Sam Webb.

The scene of the tragedy concealed more than one surprise for him, the first of which happened as he was ascending the front steps. He saw a negro, whom he took to be Webb, coming round from the rear.

"Are you Sam Webb?" he paused on the steps to inquire.

The effect of this simple question was extraordinary. At the first sound of Hazard's voice the negro started and, all at once, stood staring at him. The man's face and attitude were expressive of utmost terror and consternation.

Without the least warning, he wheeled and ran at top speed back through the narrow passageway between the two buildings.

The detective was too astonished by this singular conduct to think or act for a second, and when he did recover himself and in turn went plunging down the narrow passage to the back yard, Sam—if it were Sam—had disappeared.

With something of the feeling of an explorer into unknown wilds, Felix Hazard, instead of returning to the front of the house, mounted the rear steps; perhaps somebody was in charge.

The screen door stood wide open, and under the impact of his fist the inner door proved itself to be unfastened by swinging inward slightly.

Without the least premonition, Hazard was blinded by a flash and stunned by a deafening report as a revolver was fired almost pointblank in his face. So close was the weapon's muzzle that his cheek felt the hot blast of the explosion and the stinging touch of two or three powder grains.

At once the door was jerked clear open, and an excited young man rushed out at him, yelling:

"Good God! Did I hit you? I thought—"

Whatever he might have been thinking was not immediately revealed, for Hazard's fist caught him squarely upon the point of the chin with a blow that had all his weight behind it. The fellow went down as if every bone and sinew of his body had turned suddenly to jelly.

A minute passed, then, weak and dazed, the young fellow rose slowly to his feet. When Hazard realized how frightened and unstrung his antagonist was he regretted the impetuous blow. He pocketed the pistol and sternly demanded:

"Who are you?"

"My name's Paradis—" chattered the other, "Curtis Paradis."

"Curtis, eh? I'd like to have a word with you. Come inside."

As they entered what proved to be the kitchen, Paradis protested with nervous volubility that he had fired on a sudden impulse.

"I thought it was that crazy nigger coming back," he amplified. "He nearly frightened my sister to death."

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by an automobile, and the doctor says his spine is broke. He won't live long.

"It was like this. Sam's boss had treated him so scandalously for so long that Sam just couldn't stand it any more; so when the old man drew the money from the bank the devil just naturally got into Sam."

"Sam he plans it all out. I'm chef on a Great Northern dining car, and he knows I'll be in Chicago over Decoration day. He has me go to a colored folks' ball on Twenty-eighth street, where he's invited, and make out like I'm him. We've often done that just to be skylarking, and I thought nothing of it till I saw the papers next afternoon. Then I realized what a position I was in, pretending to be Sam, because right away I felt it was him that had killed his boss."

"I was scared. We favor one another so close, if the police was looking for Sam, like as not they'd pick me up instead of him."

"I was wild to find him. When I went to where he'd been working there was a lady and gentleman there, and by the frightened way they acted at sight of me I was surer than ever that folks knew Sam was guilty."

"Then I met this gentleman, and I thought I was gone for sure. I reckon I oughtn't to have run; but I just couldn't help it."

"By and by some colored folks told me about the accident to Sam. I went to the hospital and had him brought here. After I'd talked to him a while he promised to tell everything and give back the money he'd taken."

"As he finished speaking he went to a dresser drawer and took out a long thick manila envelope. This he handed to Hazard."

"You'll find all the money there just like Sam got it—\$2,800."

Sam Webb's story was not long. His plan to slay his employer and divert suspicion from himself was simple. He knew Paradis would be alone the night of the thirtieth, and also was familiar with Blackburn's frequent visits to the house and their object. He also was cognizant of Curtis' visits. He did not, however, know that Blackburn had left the city on the Andrew Cole that morning, and that, when he interrupted the old man's dummy-hand game and shot him with his own pistol, suspicion of Blackburn would rebound from a dead wall, and alight upon the real culprit."

"You're a duck, Felix!" Helen Bertel assured him when once more she could breathe the sooty but more familiar Loop air. "You were kind enough to take me to lunch today; if a girl should invite you to be her guest at dinner tonight, would you?"

"Ask me!" Felix Hazard interrupted.

(Copyright, 1915, by W. G. Chapman.)

TO SEE AROUND A CORNER

Some Extraordinary Things Are Being Claimed for the Invention of a Swiss.

Experiments conducted by Swiss army officers with a periscopelike device which may be attached to any kind of rifle, and will enable the possessor practically to shoot around a corner, have been remarkably successful, says a communication from Basel printed in the Swiss Rifleman's Journal, which reads, in part, as follows:

"The apparatus, which was constructed by G. Buergerin of Basel, was tested with considerable secrecy on the Allschwiler rifle range on October 3, in the presence of two ordnance officers, and quite unexpected results were achieved."